AmigaMCCC News
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Thoughts on the Amiga

Not surprisingly, it's tough, if not nearly impossible, to be an Amiga loyalist in this day and age. Even the people currently behind Amiga casually throw around materials that favor other systems such as windows, on the basis that "everyone has a PC nowadays." There's at least some truth to it, as most Amiga people have moved on, or at least added something from the Windows, Mac, or Linux camps to their repertoire, for the sake of keeping from being left behind by hardware power and the standards and non-standards of software and the web. I've got a Mac myself, serving as my primary Internet portal and performing functions currently far too inconvenient to attempt on my Amiga or Pegasos. I would never go as far as to say it's impossible for an Amiga (or Amiga-like system) to do something a PC or Mac can. Every once in a while I get a question from some ignorant/snarky person asking if the Amiga can play (insert name of latest resource-straining game here). If money were no object, any piece of current hardware or software could be available and supported for the Amiga, and the Amiga would be the match or better of any other system (probably better given the relative efficiency of the OS and more or less equal-spec hardware). Sadly, that is not the case, and the Amiga is mostly a footnote in the history of hardware and operating systems, while it's "descendants," the Pegasos and Amiga One with OS4 and MorphOS, play catch-up at best.

While you can't rule out market forces and the Microsoft juggernaut of the 'nineties, Amiga has suffered the most from poor decision-making and priorities. Commodore wanted the Amiga to recreate the mass-market success of the C-64, and had some level of success with the A500 and A1200, and much less success with the CDTV and CD-32 multimedia/game systems. This obsession with the mass-market caused them to practically ignore a smaller, but potentially lucrative market in the infant desktop video field. Thanks to NewTek's Video Toaster, and the Amiga's own native abilities, it was nearly dominant in the video field, being practically the only versatile way to produce professional titling and graphics for analog video on a budget, as well as pioneering in computer animation and digital video editing. One can only wonder what might have happened if Commodore had truly embraced and guided development to better suit that market the way Apple and the Mac latched onto the publishing and print graphics fields. It's no big deal now for someone to slap together video and burn off a DVD on their own system, but Amiga could have easily been at the forefront of that field, and the best, most popular way to do it today, smacking software like iLife or Final Cut around like little bitches, if not for a flipped decision here or there. If Escom didn't have the misfortune of acquiring lots of properties when the market ended up punishing them for doing so, Amiga systems might be very much like Pegasos systems are today, if not better. If Phase V and Haage&Partner didn't get into a stupid fight for dominance of the tiny, tiny PPC software market, we might've had a better library of PowerPC-supporting software than a bunch of files on Aminet. I won't even speculate on how (or if) the tiny left-over scraps of the Amiga user base are affected by the lawsuits, squabbles, and money issues between Amiga Inc. and Hyperion, or the whims of the programmers behind MorphOS. Perhaps it's better not to think about which decisions, if changed, would've led to a rosier outcome for the Amiga, or its extended family. It probably only leads to frustration.

I've seen groups and events where people make serious use of 8-bit Atari and Commodore systems. Even though I'm a former C-64 user, I tend to view the 8-bitters as archaic and out of touch, justified or not, much like Windows users usually view me. As an also-Mac-user, I'm less out of touch than perhaps I once was. Using the Mac has given me some perspective and proper appreciation for what I like about Amigas and the Amiga-like, however. I'm nostalgic for operating systems that put more of the control — and the risk — in your own hands. Operating systems have evolved to throw more and more layers, safeguards, and eye-candy between the user and their computer, to prevent them from breaking something if they're stupid. Even though Amiga and MorphOS don't have nearly as many features and built-in software as the heavy-hitters of today, I appreciate that they don't treat me like a child. I like being allowed to eject a CD or remove a flash drive without having to tell the system to do it for me, for example. There is risk in doing so, since I could mess up whatever media I remove if it's being written to at the time, as the Mac will remind me whenever I don't follow its rules. I can even turn off my Amiga and Pegasos on a whim, instead of going through a lengthy "shut down" process. This is a necessity for the "big" systems, which make frequent to constant use of virtual memory and swap files to support a system and software that

usually lives beyond its means, all the drive activity making simply turning off the computer a risky thing. Virtual memory and disk caches can be valuable things, but even better if you have full control of them. I get a little tired of all the behind-the-scenes activity on my Mac, which causes the time to boot or load a given piece of software to be surprisingly random.

Even though many have already written it off, I feel the Amiga is at a bit of a crossroads, even now. The potential of an Amiga-style OS on modern hardware has been shown in Amiga OS4 and MorphOS. The disadvantage of both of these systems is that they are closed commercial software by small groups of programmers with limited resources, tied to specific pieces of hardware, in a market far too small to properly support them. For this reason, I'm led to believe the best hope for the Amiga (style) to advance and survive beyond just the retro-enthusiasts lies in the AROS project. It still has a long way to go, but it has the advantages of being able to work with garden-variety PC hardware (or whatever hardware it gets ported to), as well as the (relatively) fast development of an open-source community of programmers. There's the distinct potential to surpass OS4 and Morph, especially if 68K emulation is added for legacy software support. They're even working on an open-source Kickstart ROM substitute, though that appears to be intended for the Amiga-on-chip hardware developers more than the AROS OS proper. There's the occasional talk of highly-placed community members trying to buy "Amiga" off Amiga Inc., though there's no indication of that happening anytime soon. Still, if Amiga software properties were released for open-source use, it could be a real shot in the arm, even if only a psychological one. I'm not holding onto any delusions that the Amiga OS could conquer the world, or even regain its glory of the old days, but I could see an Amiga (AROS, Morph, whatever) as another in the group of fringe operating systems that hobbyists can tryout and use, surviving and even thriving on its own steadily growing community, much the way various Linux flavors do, though on a smaller scale. As long as they keep true to the spirit of simplicity and efficiency of the Amiga OS, and don't go silly trying to recreate every little showy thing Windows or Mac OS does (I've seen it happen), the future will be rosy indeed, at least the way I want to see it.

…by Eric Schwartz
from the AmiTech-Dayton Gazette, October 2007

AmigaMCCC News

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November Calendar

November 14 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:00 pm — **South** Grand Prairie Public Library
760 Bardin Road, Grand Prairie
Note: Wednesday meeting at South GP Library

November 14 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 9:15 pm — Location TBD

November 24 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am